

THE ROLE OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR: LESSON FOR OTHER AFRICAN NATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in all human relations, irrespective of the nature of the country. Thus, the mechanism put in place to manage such conflict will determine whether it will go violent, and ultimately lead to civil war or the conflict will reduce to its barest minimum. The aftermath of civil war can be devastating as it often leads to loss of lives, properties and livelihoods. Also, whenever there is a civil war, the availability of natural resources might worsen the case as rebels often use the proceeds of natural resources to finance the war and procure arms. Therefore, this study examined the role of natural resources in the Angolan civil war. This study relied on secondary sources of data drawn from textbooks, Journals, official publications, conference papers, internet materials, newspapers, magazines and official documentaries that are relevant to the work. The study found that natural resources were not the major cause of the Angolan civil war, but it was used to finance the war. The MPLA had access to oil while the UNITA had access to diamond reserves which played a significant role in financing the war. Therefore, the study recommends that United Nations, European Union, African Union and other regional bodies should place stringent bans and restrictions on the purchase of natural resources from rebels in order to limit their chances of gaining access to funds which will definitely quell the intensity of the wars.

KEYWORDS: Angola, Natural Resources, Civil War, Finance, Diamond, Gold.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the cold war, civil war has become a predominant form of violence around the world. It is one of the deadliest human phenomena, considering its devastating effects on lives and properties, and human population. Couttenier and Soubeyran (2013) reported that since the end of World War II, more than 5 million people have died globally as a result of civil wars. Majority of these wars have deep and manifold disastrous consequences as it impedes the growth and development of countries that are immersed in protracted civil wars. A lot of these civil wars are products of grievances and resentment towards political movements and ethnic groups which has its roots in colonial experience with connection to access and control of natural resources. Although, interest and support from external actors and countries sometimes shaped the dimensions of the civil wars.

Similarly, Sambo (2016) stated that civil wars are not new phenomena; neither are they confined to certain regions in the history of humankind. Several countries in America, Europe and Middle East have experienced civil wars of different magnitudes. These include the Syrian civil war, Iraq, Afghanistan Yemen and Ukraine. Also, Yugoslav wars in Europe and the Tajikistani civil war in Asia. It is evident that civil wars are ubiquitous issues around the world but are avoidable if the necessary mechanisms are put in place. While different regions of the world have experienced one form of civil war or the other, the prevalence of civil war is conspicuous in Africa to the extent that some scholars have designated the continent as the civil war/armed conflict laboratory as a result of the high frequency of occurrence of conflict in Africa. In the last six decades, nearly 20 African countries have experienced at least one period of civil war.

According to Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002), it is estimated that 20% of the South of Sahara's population lives in countries which were at war and low-intensity conflict has become endemic to many other African states. Similarly, Burke et al. (2009) reported that more than two-thirds of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced civil war since 1960, resulting in millions of deaths and monumental human suffering. Majority of these civil wars are in one way of the other connected to the aftermath of colonial rules and ploy by some actors to seize the leadership of their countries.

Kastfelt (2005) averred that in Africa, the scene of brutal civil wars and genocide has a long history of colonial violence in form of slave trade and labour from Southern Sudan to Northern Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. Furthermore, Aremu (2010) observed that the major current that runs through Africa: from North to South, East to West and Centralis conflict and wars. Since the 1960s, a large number of civil wars had taken place in Africa. For instance: Sudan(1995-1990),Chad(1965-85),Angolasince1974,Liberia(1980-2003),Nigeria(1967-70),Somalia(1999-93)andBurundi,Rwandaand Sierra Leone (1991-2001).It won't be out of place to say the last four to six decades of African countries were immersed with blood as a result of the number of civil wars and casualties that accompanied them. For instance, there seems to be dearth of accurate figures of causalities of civil wars especially that of Nigeria between 1967-1970 but the available data on it put the deaths between 500,000 to 2 million or thereabout (South African History Online [SAHO], 2020). Also, in Sudan records put the deaths attributed to the civil way at roughly 2million. Similarly, the Chadian civil war between 1965-1985 recorded about 51,000 deaths and many more in other African countries. In Africa, millions of lives have been lost to civil wars with a lot of degradation and desecration of the countries.

Problem Analysis

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in all human relations, irrespective of the nature of the country; be it under developing, developing and developed countries. A conflict-free society has never existed, and never will it exist. Therefore, the mechanism put in place to manage such conflict will determine whether it will go violent, and ultimately lead to civil war or the conflict will reduce to its barest minimum. In Africa, civil war is not strange to the continent. Africa has witnessed quite a number of civil wars in Liberia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, Mozambique, and Nigeria and so on. In some cases, these civil wars are a result of diversity in culture and traditions of groups of people that made up the country. Also, it can also be linked to deep-rooted marginalization of some sections of the country that can be traced to the colonial experience, political instability in failing states and external financing (Couttenier and Soubeyran, 2015). Furthermore, access to and control of natural resources has plunged some countries into civil war with devastating magnitude. Therefore, there is need to establish the relationship between natural resources and civil war. In what ways have natural resources influenced the emergence or sustainability of civil wars? Thus, this study examined the role of natural resources in the Angolan civil war.

Methodology

This study relied mainly on secondary sources of data which were drawn from textbooks, Journals, official publications, conference papers, internet materials, newspapers, magazines and official documentaries that are relevant to the work. The analysis of data was based on deductions from the issues raised in the paper in light of available data gathered.

Conceptual Clarifications

Natural Resources

Natural resources are materials from the earth that are used to support life and meet people's needs. Any natural substance that humans use can be considered a natural resource. Oil, coal, natural gas, metals, stone and sand are natural resources. Other natural resources are air, sunlight, soil and water. Animals, birds, fish and plants are natural resources as well. Natural resources are used to make food, fuel and raw materials for the production of goods. All of the food that people eat comes from plants or animals. Natural resources such as coal, natural gas and oil provide heat, light and power. According to Manzano and Rigobon (2001), natural resources refer broadly to natural assets such as materials, minerals, forests, water, and fertile land that occur in nature and can be used for economic gain. Some natural assets such as oil, gas and minerals can be depleted or exhausted. These non-renewable assets have no alternative use that can yield a similar marginal revenue product. In contrast, fertile land can be used to cultivate alternate crops.

Badeeb et al. (2017) stated that natural resources can further be categorised into two namely: renewable and non-renewable renewable resources are those natural resources such as trees, water, sun and wind that can be replenished at about the same rate at which they are used. Renewable resources, however, can be depleted if not properly managed or conserved. Non-renewable resources are those natural resources that are depleted more quickly than they can regenerate. Fossil fuels like oil and natural gas were formed over millions of years. Once mined and used completely, non-renewable resources are gone forever.

Natural resources have been targets or instruments of warfare in the past and will remain so in the future. Warring parties need money and they take it wherever they can find it. Yet the character of a resource can undoubtedly influence the prosecution of war (Ullah and Rashid, 2014). The links between conflict and natural resources are not always so clear-cut, however, a country's resource wealth does not necessarily lead to violent conflict, as the examples of Norway and Canada, but also Botswana and Chile show. Yet resource-rich countries do appear to be more susceptible to conflict than the resource-poor.

Civil War

Civil wars and similar large-scale violence bring death, injury, disease, displacement, and misery. Civil war is a politically organized, large-scale, sustained, physically violent conflict that occurs within a country principally among large/numerically important groups of its inhabitants or citizens over the monopoly of physical force within the country (Gersovitz and Kriger, 2013). Civil wars usually have incumbent governments that control the state and have a monopoly of force before the civil war and challengers' people who have not effectively challenged the monopoly of others before the outbreak of the civil war but whose challenge initiates the outbreak of the civil war. The challengers may begin as a small group, but for the episode to rise to the level of a civil war, they must become numerically important.

The challengers may seek to replace the incumbents in control of the monopoly of force within the extant territory of the state, or they may seek the secession of part of the original territory. The achievement of their goals must be plausible. A civil war is not just a sufficiently large group of people over a sufficiently long time who make trouble for the government and undermine security, such as large drug cartels, because they do not aim to possess the monopoly of force. Civil wars must entail large-scale and sustained internal political violence to distinguish them from intense but limited episodes of political violence that contest the monopoly of force, such as political assassinations, mutinies, or coups. Civil war violence may involve external actors, but the violence occurs within the boundaries of a country and predominantly involves internal actors.

Overview of Angola

Before delving into the details of the civil war, this section will discuss a brief background of Angola and how the ethnic difference played a major role in igniting the war. Angola is located on the western coast of southern Africa, south of the Equator. Land borders are shared by Namibia to the south, Zambia to the east and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the north. It covers an area of 1,246,700 sq. km and is composed of 18 provinces, one of which, Cabinda, is separated from the others by the oceanic outlet of the Democratic Republic of Congo. From the ethnic point of view, there are three major ethnic groups in Angola which include: the Ovimbundu who represent 37% of the population, the Ambundu with 25%, and the Bakongo 13%. Other numerically important groups include the closely interrelated Chokwe and Lunda, the Ganguela and Nyaneka-Khumbi (in both cases classification terms that stand for a variety of small groups), the Ovambo, the Herero, the Xindonga and scattered residual groups of San (Zartman, 1995). In addition, mixed race (European and African) people amount to about 2%, with a small (1%) population of whites, mainly ethnically Portuguese.

The Angolan Civil War

In Angola, the civil war between (1975-2002) began immediately after the country became independent from Portugal in Nov 1975. The civil war began immediately after the country became independent from Portugal in November 1975. Like many other African countries that experienced civil wars, the Angolan civil war had its roots in the colonial regime of Portugal. The reluctance of the dominant liberation movements to share power within a multi-ethnic society sparked what seems to be the ignite of the war. Prior to the independence, a power-sharing arrangement was agreed upon, after independence was secured, power struggles ensued almost immediately as the agreement collapsed. This was aggravated by the withdrawal of the Portuguese in 1975; refusing to impose peace or supervise elections, and failing to hand over power to any one party, the Portuguese armies exited Angola and left the country and its future to its own devices. Hence, the common anti-colonial goal was abandoned, and the three dominant liberation movements which include: Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) led by Agostinho Neto, National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by Jonas Savimbi and National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) led by Holden Roberto began a steady struggle for power. On August 1, 1975, UNITA formally declared war on the MPLA (SAHO, 2020).

The Angolan civil war was initially driven by the sharp ideological differences between MPLA and UNITA. At a later stage, MPLA with the help of the Cuban troops and Soviet arms repelled UNITA and FNLA forces. The war later took another shift and led to a proxy war between USA and USSR. Furthermore, at the end of the cold war, the focus of the rebels shifted from political power to seizing and maintaining control over Angolan natural resources in 1991. These resources include diamond, crude oil, gold, platinum, nickel, chrome, iron, copper, manganese, kaolin, gypsum, quartz, zinc, phosphates, granite, marble, uranium, lead, wolfram, tin, fluorite, sulphur, feldspar, mica, asphalt, and talc. Although, the focus of the rebels then was on diamonds and crude oil. The diamond and crude oil played a pivotal role in the elongation of the civil war, as it made available sources of finance to the rebels' which helped in procuring arms and other logistics. The structure and geographical positioning of diamond and crude oil further gave the two major groups hope in pursuing their struggle.

Ben (2020) reported that Angola's resource reserves can be geographically divided. This favoured both parties as much of the oil is found offshore, benefiting the MPLA, who controlled Luanda and the coastal region, while diamond reserves are located largely in the hinterlands controlled at the time by UNITA (Malaquias 2001, as cited in Ben, 2020). This resource wealth to some extent dictated the actions and expression of these two, defining their method of conducting war. For instance, the diamond wealth afforded the UNITA the opportunity to sustain a rebellion against MPLA through guerrilla warfare. Whereas the coastal oil reserves allowed the MPLA to rule through a system of patrimonialism, constructed in the ruins of the colonial governance structures. Therefore, the role of the natural resources in the Angolan civil war cannot be overemphasized because apart from the human population which made available the foot soldiers, the natural resources are the major strength of the civil war because if there is no money to purchase arms, food and other logistics used in the war, the war will die a natural death when the people are tired and worn out.

Prior to the liberation fight between the people of Angola and the Portuguese colonial regime, there exist a sharp difference among the ethnic groups in Angola especially the three major ethnic groups that is, Ovimbundu, Ambundu and Bakongo. This is evident in the formation of

their liberation force that fought the colonial regime. The Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) was the liberation movement that was supported by the Ovimbundu people while the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) enjoyed the support of the Ambundu people and the multiracial intelligentsia of cities such as Luanda, Benguela and Huambo. In addition to that, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) was rooted among the Bakongo people and strongly supported the restoration and defence of the Kongo empire, eventually developing into a nationalist movement.

Bvirindi (2019) reported that from 1961 to 1974, three nationalist movements National Front for Liberation of Angola (FNLA), Popular Movement for Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and National Union for Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) led a war for national liberation against the Portuguese colonial administration. This war ended after the overthrow of the fascist regime in Portugal on April 25, 1974, by a group of Portuguese army officers dissatisfied with the increasingly high human and material costs of the conflict. The new Portuguese regime quickly granted independence to its African colonies. Tragically for Angola, however, independence did not usher in a new era of peace and development. Instead, the nationalist movements, unable to overcome deep-seated ethnic and ideological divisions among them, plunged the country into a fratricidal war even before independence from Portugal was officially granted on November 11, 1975. Also, these three liberation movements were not only from three different ethnic groups, but all have different ideologies and missions. Hence, the competition for the leadership of political power in Angola was a hidden agenda for all the movements. Therefore, the crisis that eventually led to the civil war was hidden in the selfish interest of all the liberation movements of Angola.

The immediate background of the conflict in Angola is the war of independence between 1961-1975, which terminated with a situation where the three major liberation movements MPLA, FNLA and UNITA could not agree on how to share power. Attempts to reconcile the parties were made through the Alvor conference in 1975 and several other initiatives, but the agreements fell apart as a result of antagonisms related both to political views, national support base, external ties, and personal relations (Tvedten, 1989). The history of the Angolan civil war cannot be divorced from the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles of Angola's neighbours, Namibia and South Africa, nor from the Cold War logic in which the Soviet Union and the United States backed opposing sides in any conflict.

Anderson (2000) reported that soon after the Angolan independence, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) gained the support of South Africa and the United States in its struggle against the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). This alliance was more strategic than ideological, as UNITA's stronghold was in the south along the border with Namibia, where South Africa was fighting a war. Hence, this position UNITA in a position which made them enjoy a symbiosis relationship between them and South Africa. In exchange for South African arms and military support, UNITA targeted the Namibian independence fighters as well as the MPLA, which enjoyed the support of Angola's small urban middle class and was backed by the USSR and Cuba. Therefore, it could be established that there are a lot of factors that contributed to the protracted nature of the civil war.

According to Frynas and Geoffrey (2001), the MPLA exercised marginal control over the capital or the central government, while UNITA struggled to control the hinterlands and the coast.

UNITA financed itself with sales of diamonds, which came to be called “blood diamonds” for their role in fuelling the war. The MPLA, on the other hand, relied mainly on sales of oil. UNITA focused on sabotaging communications and economic targets. The MPLA, with the help of Cuban troops, tried to root out UNITA strongholds. Therefore, despite the external or regional forces that lights the civil war, the availability of finance to sustain the war through environmental resources which include diamonds and crude oil. Hence, whenever there is availability of funds through natural resources the possibility of protracted conflict is inevitable as the sale of the resources available the rebel leader’s opportunity to purchase arms and other things that will sustain the war. The sustained war led to wanton loss of lives and properties and displacement of persons.

Roles of Environmental Resources in the Angolan Civil war (1975-2002)

Over the years, environmental resources have been seen as one of the major causes of conflict as a result of access to and control of natural resources. Ross (2004) stated that since 1990, at least 18 violent conflicts have been fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources, whether high-value resources like timber, diamonds, gold, minerals and oil; or scarce ones like fertile land and water. Regardless of whether or not natural resources play a causal role in the onset of the conflict, they can serve to prolong and sustain violence. The high-value resources can be used to generate revenue for financing the armed forces and the acquisition of weapons. Capturing such resources becomes a strategic objective for military campaigns, thereby extending their duration. In the context of the Angolan Civil war between 1975-2002, environmental resources weren’t the causal factor of the war because there exists a deep-seated conflict over ideological differences and access to and control of political power of the country among the major ethnic groups. Despite their differences, these three major ethnic groups managed to have a common goal. That is, putting an end to colonial domination of their country. Between 1961 to 1974, Angolans opposed Portuguese colonial rule by violent, revolutionary struggle and they were able to end the domination. The failure of the Portuguese colonial regime to usher in a democratically elected government or all-inclusive government in Angola gave room for the leaders of the three-liberation movement to fight for control of the political power.

According to Bayramov (2017), the relationship between natural resources, the environment and war are thus multi-dimensional and complex, but three principal pathways can be drawn:

- i. Contributing to the outbreak of war: Attempts to control natural resources or grievances caused by inequitable wealth sharing or environmental degradation can contribute to the outbreak of violence. Countries that depend on the export of an array set of primary commodities may also be more vulnerable to civil war.
- ii. Financing and sustaining war: Once conflict has broken out, extractive high-value resources may be exploited to finance armed forces, or become strategic consideration in gaining territory. In such cases, the duration of civil war is extended by the availability of new sources of financing, or complicated by efforts to gain control over resource-rich areas.
- iii. Undermining peace-making: The prospect of a peace agreement may be undermined by individuals or splinter groups that could lose access to the revenues generated by resource exploitation if peace were to prevail. Once a peace agreement is in place, the exploitation

of natural resources can also threaten political reintegration and reconciliation by providing economic incentives that reinforce political and social divisions (Holland, 2009).

Apart from the foreign support from USSR, United States, Cuba and South Africa, the existence of easily captured and exploited natural resources not only makes civil war economically feasible and, therefore, it may also alter the dynamics of war itself by encouraging combatants to direct their activities towards securing the assets that enable them to continue to fight. This is a classic example of the Angolan civil war as the warring groups capitalized on the exploration of the environmental resources in financing their course, especially in arms purchases. According to Ferreira (2006), the Angolan civil war was funded by the sales of diamonds found in territories controlled by UNITA. UNITA had strong alliances with apartheid South Africa, the USA, the UK and France who were the customers of the blood diamonds, while the ruling MPLA was supported by the USSR and Cuba. Later in the conflict MPLA sold oil to finance its war efforts. It is worthy of note that majority of the external influence in the civil war was to gain access to the oil and diamond in exchange for arms. Meanwhile, the rebels do not have the leverage to negotiate as they were seriously in need of arms in order to sustain their war.

Hence, the foreign countries took advantage of their situation and milk their oil and diamond. Thus, revenues and riches can alter the mindset of belligerents, transforming war and insurgency into an economic rather than purely political activity, with violence resulting less from grievance than from greed. Russell (2004) reported that by the mid-nineties what had been the typical Cold War conflict had become cash of natural resources; the oil of the MPLA against the diamonds of Savimbi's control of the north-eastern part of Angola reportedly provided UNITA with an estimated US\$400-500 million a year to fund the war. Hence, the Angolan civil war might have been short-lived if not for the availability of oil and diamond they were used to protract their way to the severity stage. According to Amnesty International (2006), the interaction between the internal conflict and external rivalries contributed significantly to the severity of the civil war resulting in several peace pacts being violated and an estimated 1.5 million people being killed and over 4 million people displaced.

Lesson for other African Nations

War is a horrible experience as it takes its toll on virtually all sectors of the country. The wanton loss of lives, properties and livelihood that often accompanies civil wars has brought some countries to their knees; while fighting a tedious fight to recover from the aftermath of the civil wars even after one or two decades that the war ended. It is obvious that natural resources were not the major factor responsible for the Angolan civil war; but they played a significant role in sustaining the war by using the proceeds of the sales of natural resources to finance the war. No doubt, African countries are blessed with different kinds of natural resources, and these resources have resulted in the downfall of many nations as a result of mismanagement. The Angolan civil war might have ended years before it actually ended if they don't use proceeds from natural resources to finance the war. Therefore, other African countries should come up with regulations with respect to sales of natural resources during crises period with the help of the African Union and United Nations as this will help in regulating the flow of money that might be diverted to finance the war.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Irrespective of the causal factors of the Angolan civil war, the role of environmental resources cannot be overemphasized. The civil war was largely funded by the sales of diamonds and oil. To a large extent, the rebels enjoyed high cash flow from the resources they sold at both ends while the countries purchasing those resources from them did everything possible to sustain the civil war as it is advantageous to them. This war took away the leverage of Angola as a nation to properly negotiate the amount of oil and diamonds in exchange for arms and money remitted to both groups fighting. Therefore, the war might have ended a long time ago with minimal casualties had it been money from oil and diamonds were not available to the rebels which they maximized in pursuing their course. Therefore, it is expedient for United Nations, European Union, African Union and other regional bodies to place stringent bans and restrictions on the purchase of natural resources from rebels in order to limit their chances of gaining access to funds which will definitely quell the intensity of the war unlike the case of civil war in Angola where the natural resources were used to finance and sustain the civil war for many years.

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